

Testimony on Behalf of the  
Associated Students of Montana  
State University Billings

*Scott A. Martin*  
*ASMSU-B Lobbyist*

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Bill: **House Bill No. 194**

Rep. Michael Lange (R – HD 55)

*A BILL FOR AN ACT ENTITLED: "AN ACT PROVIDING FOR A FUND  
TRANSFER TO EACH UNIT OF THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM BASED  
UPON THE NUMBER OF RESIDENT STUDENTS ENROLLED IN AND  
ATTENDING THE UNIT; PROVIDING A LIMIT ON THE AMOUNT  
AVAILABLE FOR TRANSFER; APPROPRIATING THE AMOUNT  
TRANSFERRED TO THE UNIT; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE  
DATE."*

Position: **SUPPORT**

Date: **Wednesday, January 17, 2007; 3:00 pm**

Before: **House Education Committee**

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"Mr. Chair, Members of the committee:

For the record, I am Scott Martin, and I represent the students of Montana State University Billings.

I rise today to speak not only in support of House Bill 194, but I also rise to speak in support of tuition relief for the 4,800 students that I represent.

Montana State University Billings serves a unique demographic; with an average age of 26.5 years and ninety percent of students commuting to campus; we have a population that is not commonly found on the traditional college campus. But for that non-traditional demographic comes a number of obstacles to gaining access to a higher education. Their greatest obstacle is college affordability. Eighty percent of our students are receiving need-based financial aid, most of which in the form of student loans, causing many students to acquire massive debt. For the vast majority of our students, college would not be possible without financial aid. Eighty-one percent of our students are forced to have jobs while at the same time juggling rigorous course loads. And because our students are forced into employment to pay for their education, they have to try to balance their work schedules with their class schedules. And as a result, their performance in the classroom suffers, and many are forced to drop out. Students are being forced to choose between expanding their knowledge for vocational development, and putting food on the table. They need help. On our campus, thirty-one percent of our students have children to care for. And because they have to work and they are trying to better themselves and the lives of their children, they are spending too much time away from their children. And they need help. The more our students have to pay for their education, the more they have to work, and the more they have to work, the less time and energy they spend on attaining their education. It is a no win situation for many of our students. They need help.

For the past fifteen years, state support for higher education has steadily decreased. Going from 76.4% for year 1992 to 37.8% for year 2007. That is a significant drop, and the students are having to make up the difference it through their tuition. And it is having a dramatic impact on the wallets of our students, and their families. And now this legislature has the opportunity to change that this session. You have the opportunity to invest in Montana's future, by investing in higher education. By investing in education, you put people power behind the economy of our great state. The more educated we are, the more jobs we can fill and produce, the more jobs we can fill and produce, the more money we circulate through our communities. MSU-Billings and its students are terrific examples of how investing in higher education pays off. Roughly 76 to 94% of students (depending on which of our colleges they graduated from) received job placement here in Montana last year. That is significant, and it shows how much higher education matters to our state by creating and filling jobs.

House Bill 194, on its own, cannot provide significant relief to the students of the Montana University System, but it is a fantastic start. I know that the students that I represent appreciate this bill, and they appreciate the spirit in which this bill was framed. And on behalf of the students of MSU-Billings, I would like to thank Representative Lange for his sponsorship of this bill. I'd like to finish by adding that Montana State University Billings has a motto that appears on standard logo: "Access and Excellence." MSU-Billings is committed to providing both to our students, and we hope that you all are too.

Thank you Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee for your time and consideration."